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139

A
SERMON

Preach'd at

ISLEWORTH

IN THE

County of MIDDLESEX,

On Sunday, February 10, 1722.

Occasioned by the

RAPE and MURDER

Committed on the Body of *Anne Bristow*,
January 22. on Smalbury-Green in that
Parish.

By RICHARD COLEIRE, M. A.
Vicar of *Isleworth*, and of *Kingston upon*
Thames.

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JUDGES XIX. 30.

And it was so, that all that saw it said, there was no such deed done nor seen, from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Ægypt unto this day. Consider of it; take advice, and speak your minds.



AS there is a degeneracy from the principles of religion and humanity in the perpetration of crimes which are horridly wicked; so not to be struck with horror and detestation of such monstrous crimes, is a sort of accessory guilt in those who did not commit them.

For (putting it out of the supposition that sins of such a nature lay the place under a curse where they are committed,

till it is cleans'd by the Blood of the Offenders) to be wanting in a due indignation at such abominable wickedness, is a sign that we have neither a zeal of God, nor for the publick good; and both religion and humanity suffer in such a criminal indifference.

BUT the supposition must by no means be laid aside that the land is defil'd, till sins of a crying guilt are pursu'd, and fully reveng'd. God hath wrote it down in such capital edicts, that they must be pursu'd; that there shall be no sanctuary, no protection for such enormous criminals; that there shall be no safety, no attonement for the innocent, but by bringing the guilty to justice; that false compassion to such contagious monsters of men, is real cruelty to our selves; and we become Partakers of their sins in the worst of senses, by suffering the Divine Inquisition to hang over our heads, unless we are careful and earnest, as much as in us lies, to cleanse our selves from their guilt, by the expiation of their punishment.

SUCH

SUCH is that defilement of blood which now lies upon us, in the most lewd and beastly murder that surely was ever committed: A murder committed by sons of *Belial* among us, which reflects upon the education, the discipline, the authority of the place we live in: For sons of *Belial*, if we respect the etymology or composition of the word, are wretches who have no knowledge of God, or sense of religion: Wretches, who are under no restraint, but boundless in their iniquities: And what dishonour must it cast upon christian parentage, christian institution, and indeed, the christian name, that such wretches shou'd grow up under no manner of christian restraint, to involve us in the guilt of crimes, horrible to christian sense and polluting to christian ears!

BUT we have this to comfort our selves with, under our present local defilement, that, as the divine Wisdom hath prescrib'd a method for us, how we may cleanse our selves from this blood; so
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we have testified our actual innocence, by our detestation of the unparalleled crime; and pursu'd the audacious criminals, that their guilt might not rest upon us.

AND as there is no precedent in the Scriptures which so nearly resembles the late barbarity committed among us, as that which is recorded for us in the chapter of my text, so it is fit that the same indignation and zeal should animate us, as did the Israelites in the same case.

FOR it was so, that all that saw it said, there was no such thing done nor seen, from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Ægypt unto this day. Consider of it; take advice; and speak your minds.

IN speaking to these words I shall,

I. CONSIDER the fact of my text, and the exemplary abhorrence which the *Israelites* express'd against it, as both may serve to heighten the late crime committed among us, and our just indignation at it.

II. THE large revenge which they took

took of that detested murder, as necessary to free themselves from the guilt in which they had been, otherwise, involv'd.

III. THE uses we ought to make of the whole parallel case, and how we may probably prevent the like future wickedness.

I. THEN let us consider the fact of my text, and the exemplary abhorrence which the *Israelites* express'd against it, thereby to heighten the late crime committed among us, and our just indignation at it.

A Levite of *Mount Ephraim*, returning from *Bethlehem Judah* home ward, with his concubine or wife, took up his lodging at *Gibeah*, a city of the *Benjamites*.

THE men of *Gibeah*, being addicted to the sin of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, demand to have knowledge of this stranger, in that abominable nameless way: however, his concubine they get, and abuse her all night; and the *Levite* finds
her

her dead in the morning, at the door of his entertainers house.

THESE concubines were a lower sort of wives, or hand-maids, married without writings or other legal ceremonies; and their children were legitimate, but not heirs to the fathers estate. There was no disreputation to the *Israelites* in the keeping of them: and, but that our Saviour tells us they were dispens'd with, in this, by God, for the hardness of their hearts, the indulgence is mentioned in the Old Testament with no manner of blemish.

HAD it been otherwise, or the Levite had been conscious to himself that his companying with that woman was criminal, he would not have made so loud a declaration of his wrongs, nor call'd for so publick a revenge: but as his circumstance was without suspicion his complaints were without reserve; and he fear'd not to make all *Israel* judges of the singular injury.

INDEED,

INDEED, the barbarity of the manner in which his concubine lost her life, put him upon a method of challenging justice which was something unnatural as well as extraordinary: He divided her carcase into twelve pieces, and sent a part of it to every tribe in *Israel*. But as passion dictated a course which was never thought of before, so the unusual sight, as much as the unusual murder, procur'd him the concurrence of a deep and universal sympathy.

THE *Tribes* unanimously declare themselves detesters of the shocking fact; and in reflecting upon the foulness of it, they seem to bless themselves that *Israel* was never chargeable with such a-bominable guilt before: By how much the more the crime was unparallel'd, by so much the more they sicken'd in contemplation of it. Their hearts turn'd within them to think, that any of the seed of *Jacob*, any under the regulation of such divine laws and ordinances as they were, should blacken the whole name,

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stigmatize the whole theocrasie, by laying such a brutal murder to the charge of Gods elect, as heathens, without any law, would disdain to perpetrate. And when they call upon one another confusedly to consider the matter, to consult, deliberate, and speak freely about it, it gives us such an image of an inspir'd perturbation, as shew'd they would neither bear the scandal of the crime, nor suffer the offenders to live.

PERMIT me, I beseech you, to bring the precedent home; and to inculcate, that whereas the murder lately committed among us exceeds that of my text in many hateful circumstances, our abhorrence and zeal against it, ought not to be less.

HERE, we have not only that vile stupration to abominate, which, for ought we see, was the whole of the *Gibeathites* crime, and might have ended, like that in a bloodless death; but we have such subsequent cruelties to nauseate upon it, as demonstrate our sons of *Belial* have been

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been children of Hell. Here, lust, even satisfy'd turn'd into infernal rage; and the manner of the murder was so exquisitely savage that the poor victim was kill'd by peace-meal, scratch'd, and tore, and kick'd, and stamp'd to death. Here seem'd to be a delight, which could be copied from none but fiends, in the bitter shriekings of intolerable misery: and her torturers rested till she could scream again, as if her painful sensations without her cries, were a sort of defeat to their cruelty.

Was there ever such a thing seen or done in our Israel? take advice, and speak your minds. Was there ever such blood-guiltiness, such crying blood, heard of and not detested, detested and not reveng'd? Blessed be God, we have detested it, we do detest it; and those who have any religion or humanity in them cannot but detest it!

AND yet, O shame to every sentiment which can flow from God or nature, there are of those among us who have conversed with these murderers; who

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have frequently seen them since they became such devoted heads; who cou'd have brought them to justice, and cleansed this place from blood; and who, by the falsest notions that ever were cherish'd in uninstructed breasts, would become partakers of this crime by screening the hateful criminals, when they wou'd run the whole countrey over in the pursuit of a petty thief!

WHEN the men of *Israel* made a holy congregation before the Lord at *Mizpeh* upon the occasion of my text, *All the people arose, as one man, saying, we will not any of us go to his tent, neither will any of us return into his house, — but, we will do, when we come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.* This was a great and worthy resolution, and highly becoming the people of God! With us, *who name the name of Christ*, and who, as we shou'd (by the seal of our common charter) *depart from iniquity*, we shou'd much more abominate and disclose all monstrous wickedness;

edness; it is an evangelical and moral shame that we shou'd ever have help'd to conceal such monsters of men, whose folly is complicated with all the aggravations of villany! And as the *Congregation of Israel* afterwards *smote the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead with the edge of the sword*, because they wou'd not join in the punishment of those wicked *Benjamites*; so shou'd we, who have any zeal of God, or for the execution of highly demerited justice, look upon those as men of *Jabesh-Gilead*, who have not had the same concern with us, for securing our wicked miscreants, and deny them all common countenance, till they have shew'd their repentance.

THUS far, at the first hand, we shou'd all be like-minded, in abhorring the blood which hath been shed among us, and in carrying on the hue and cry against the untaken murderers, to shew that we perfectly agree with this divine declaration, that *blood, it defileth the land*: But, as the land cannot be cleans'd from the blood
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that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it, so there is something more due from them who wou'd not lie under God's inquisition for blood, than barely to detest the baneful murderer. Which brings me,

II. To consider the large revenge which the *Israelites* took upon the tribe of *Benjamin* for the murder of my text, as necessary to free them from the guilt in which they had otherwise been involv'd.

I call it a large revenge, because it exceeded the rule and proportion which God himself had settled for the avenging of blood. The first law which God enacts against murder, speaks no more than this, *whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*; and in the book of *Numbers*, where the several sorts of murders are specify'd and defin'd, tho' God sufficiently declares the diffusive infection of this sin, yet he allows the infectious guilt to be taken off, if the offender be brought to justice, and put to death :

death: But in the case of the woman forced till she dyed by the lustful Gibeathites, the whole tribe of Benjamin suffer'd, tho' but a few of their brethren were concern'd; and the expiation itself looks like a new murder, by destroying the innocent with the guilty.

INDEED, there is a contracted or secondary guilt in this singular crime, which brings men within the direct punishment for that blood which they never spilt. To protect a murderer from justice, is to become a murderer one's self: And how far human laws may lay hold on those who make themselves partakers of the crime, by protecting the criminal; the divine law submits them to the same temporal punishment; and this is a rul'd case for the justice of that severity.

FOR, tho' all the men of Israel were gather'd against the city of Gibeah, knit together as one man; yet, before they took upon them to become the revengers of blood, they expostulated with the whole tribe of Benjamin, and demanded the

the murderers from among them. *The tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, what wickedness is this which is done among you? Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel. Had they deliver'd up the guilty, they wou'd have been guiltless themselves; and the sword of Israel would have gone no farther than in cutting off the inhuman ravishers of Benjamin. But in false regard to some few monsters of their own tribe, the Benjamites took the guilt, and drew the punishment upon themselves. And had it not been thoroughly executed upon them, almost to the extermination of their tribe, the evil of that execrable action wou'd have diffus'd it self wider, and the divine justice would have visited for it throughout all the tribes of Israel.*

THAT

THAT people knew too well, at their own repeated cost, what it was to stir up the anger of the Lord to visit them for offences which they would not punish themselves. Their seed was as the sand of the sea shore indeed, but they fell by multiplied thousands upon any act of publick disobedience; and the divine vengeance wou'd not be pacified nor stayed, till judgment was executed upon the disobedient.

AND of all the sins which cry to heaven for vengeance, God has declar'd that murder makes the loudest demands upon him; and the book of *Revelations* describes its redoubled importunity, *how long, O Lord, how long wilt thou not judge and avenge our blood!* Therefore, to put the matter out of his own hands, and to make his people judges and revengers of the crime who were the sufferers by it, God gave the children of *Israel* laws, whereby they might govern themselves in all the cases of blood; but with this reserve to his own honour and

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vengeance, that if they wou'd not take the life of the murderer for the life of the murder'd, he wou'd resume the matter, and shew himself a terrible avenger, by animadverting upon the whole land as guilty of blood.

THUS there lay a sad necessity upon all the tribes of *Israel*, first to destroy the principals in this murder at *Gibeah*, and next, to carry on their vengeance against the whole tribe of *Benjamin*, who had made themselves presumptuous accessories in that horrid fact; unless they wou'd suffer themselves to become criminal by not executing judgment, and their whole land to lie under a fearful expectation of divine vengeance for that blood.

PERHAPS we may look upon all this as the ceremonial strictness of the Mosaic law; to which we are not oblig'd, who are under another dispensation; a dispensation which no where lays a land under divine penalties for unpunish'd murders; and that therefore we are not
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under the same common concern to bring such offenders to justice.

BUT here we shou'd do well to observe, that at all times, and in all places, the reason of a law, and especially of a divine law, is the law it self: And if murder appears, at least, to be as heinous a sin, under the law of *Christ*, as it was under the law of *Moses*; if the reasons for which it is a crying and importunate sin, are, at least, still the same; then it must follow, that a christian land is, at least, as much defil'd with blood, as the land of the *Israelites* cou'd be; and that no milder course can cleanse it from blood, than that which God appointed under the law of *Moses*.

Now the reasons why murder will ever remain the same crying sin, have, partly a relation to God, partly to man: With regard to God, *Irritamus Creatorem cum illius delemus imaginem*, We provoke the Creator, when we destroy his image; for, *in the image of God made he man*: With regard to man, *Incolumi-*

tas singulorum est tutela omnium, the safety of single persons is the safeguard of all. And if the indignity offer'd to God be the same now as ever in committing murder, reason tells us we lie under the same divine inquisition for unrevenged blood : if the saving of murderers be the cause of more murders, as experience throughout all ages demonstrates that it is ; then to spare the wolf is to destroy the sheep ; and so we doubly offend against God and our neighbour too.

FOR this reason we must not think that we are no wise concern'd in this severe injunction, *Thine eye shall not pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him* ; for there lies a perpetual obligation upon us, especially in God's sight, to whom we must answer the contrary, and, in truth, for our land's sake, upon which we bring evil by such pity and concealment, that if *Our brother the son of our mother, or our son or our daughter, or the wife of our bosom, or our friend, which is as our own soul,*

Soul, sin against God and the land by shedding of blood; we must leave them to that unalterable equity which requires life for life.

IN most other criminal cases, we may laubably plead for pity and pardon, as we are Christians, and most nobly so when we are most compassionate: but the sin of blood is such high treason against God, so productive of vengeance upon the land which is defiled with it, that it calls upon our utmost fortitude neither to pity nor spare it, unless we would answer for it in judgments both here and hereafter.

As for those unhappy wretches, who may soon cleanse this place, this land from blood by the legal forfeiture of their own; since justice has found some of them we may change the quality of our zeal, and contemplate them in the bowels of charity and compassion for their souls.

IT is, respectively, well for them, and a sort of happiness in misery, that the
mercy

mercy of christian executions gives respite for repentance, whereas the *Jewish* revengers of blood hew'd down the murderer wherever they found him. The national fervor of that people was so hot against the manslayer, that the next of Kin, the next neighbour, or any that would take the revenge of blood upon him was a legal avenger; and as, only in the case of unpremeditated murder the congregation was to judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood, so, where he lay under no such restraint he hunted after his victim as a Lion does after his prey, and the requital seem'd to be directed against soul and body together.

BUT the christian murderer, tho' he is a much greater criminal, meets with mercy which he has not shew'd, and may prepare himself that the killer of his body may have no power to kill his soul. In this the christian prosecutor may assist with his advice, his wishes and his prayers: In this every christian

stian visitant is oblig'd to give his help.

AND altho', in the case of this abominable murder, the laws of God and man compel us to prosecute blood for blood; not only for Gods sake, not only for our own, but that those which remain may hear and fear, and henceforth commit, no more, any such evil among us; yet here our justice ends, and all the rest is mercy.

IN mercy we may relieve their bodily wants, for even a due preparation for death is often obstructed by the raving cries of hunger and thirst. In mercy we ought to enrol them in our publick and private prayers, that God would open their hearts to acknowledge the vileness of their doings, and that they may find place for repentance, by seeking it earnestly with tears. In every instance of charity to their souls we cannot go too far, according as our zeal may prompt us, or abilities support our zeal; and even in bringing them to justice our views should be only charitable, as
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charity, as the love of God, and the love of man for Gods sake: for a regard to Gods honour and commands; to the publick safety and welfare; and to the wholesome warnings which spectacles of terrour may give, are principles which turn such prosecutions into sacrifices, and terminate all in love. I come now,

III. To consider the uses we ought to make of the whole parallel case, and how we may probably prevent such future wickedness.

As the fact of our *Gibeathites* is now past recall, we cannot better shew that our hands have not shed this blood neither have our eyes seen it; that is, we cannot better expiate for our guiltless defilement and shame, in that it was perpetrated among us, than by washing our consciences from any concealment or extenuation of the inhuman deed, as we would our hands from the blood itself.

OUR *Israel* hath express'd its thoughts upon this polluted murder in as high
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and universal an indignation as ever old *Israel* could upon the murder of my text: and as there are monstrous enhancements belonging to this crime, which make that other, in respect of it, to appear as nothing; so our christian *Israel*, as one man, some few of *Benjamin* excepted, have raised their abhorrence to the singularity of the crime; and it was impossible under such a just hatred to it, that the criminals should escape.

BUT that some of the stains of *Benjamin* belong to us, in that we, who, of all the tribes of *Israel* could most easily have apprehended them, suffered a price to be set upon their heads that they might not flee away; in that new schemes have been meditated to serve the murderers, as if some accident had bruise'd and broken the carcase to that degree which appear'd; devolves a shame upon the guiltless among us, that any would implicate themselves in such accessory guilt, as to leave the divine vengeance for blood upon us, rather

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than

than suffer us to be cleans'd by the just shedding of blood.

To them, who, by conversing with the word of God, know the penalties which fall upon a people for the sin of blood, I cannot appear too zealous in what I have offer'd, nor too severe in any part of the exasperating argument. They who may think me so, would be otherways minded if they were better informed, or if they were not, some way or other, allied to the unhappy delinquents. But they, together with us, should consider well, how disengag'd we ought to be from partial affections, when God who will not spare may be provoked by our partiality, to punish us and our posterity for the pollution of this blood.

IF any of those loose and dissolute young men, who were companions with our criminals in their frequent riotings, chance to be my hearers, as it is too much a chance whenever they are; let them reflect, how merciful God was to them

them that they were not in that grand disorder, wherein a body, and perhaps a soul, was murder'd; and for which their comrades are like to come to a fearful end. Let them consider, that if they take not warning at a crime so abominable in it self; so terrible in its consequences; and which might have been their own, for any thing within them which cou'd have restrain'd them from it: *Their destruction will likewise come upon them unawares*, with less pity from men, less hope of pardon from God. For they, whose hearts are harden'd against all impressions of terrour from sufferings of others for crimes, which are, in great measure, their own; devote themselves to wrath, by resisting the Spirit of grace; and are fit for the greatest villanies which earth or hell can punish.

As for us, if it is shocking and shameful enough to have had one such unparallel'd crime committed among us, let us bewail that past remissness, as our part

of the sin, whereby such disorderly wretches were left so unboundedly to themselves.

THE nearest part of that guilt lies at those masters doors, who took no other care of their servants than as they exacted their labours; who held them to no observance of duties becoming christians, or even civiliz'd men; and who, by slackness of all discipline toward them, made it a common observation, that their servants knew not so much as the outward respect, which was due, even by the cap or civil language, to their very masters.

THE remoter part of the sin may be charg'd upon all those, who knew their domestick untowardness, their frequent extravagant fallies, and brought them not under the correction of the magistrate for their daily growing faults.

THEY may deeply bewail where they are, in that dismal house of thought, that no friendly severity prevented them from rushing into their present crime:
And

And now more than ever does it lie upon us to unite in preserving our poorer youth from future destruction, by a strict eye upon their whole conduct, especially in their idle hours, that the scandal they have given may not be repeated, and that they may have no time nor place for presumptuous sins.

ABOVE all, it becomes the church officers, as a solemn part of their duty, to give warning first, and to be very careful afterwards, that none of these undisciplin'd servants prophane our holy days. It has been an old custom among them to meet to game and excrete, when they should have made up a part of the congregation in the public worship of God: they have removed their haunts of ungodly concourse, as often as they have fear'd discovery; but still they have kept them somewhere, to the hardening of themselves in wickedness. If their masters will not hinder this, they are punishable themselves; if they cannot, the civil and parish-

parish-magistrate will give their countenance and help. And they who have the least regard to religion, let them object against it what they please, must own, that its influence and restraints kill the growth of abandon'd wickedness.

And now, O Lord, be merciful to thy people, whom thou hast redeem'd, and lay not the guilt of this blood to our charge; and that we may put the guilt of all future blood from among us, make us, and those that belong to us, to do that which is right in thy sight, O Lord.



FINIS.





